



Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Biennium Budget in regards to the Department of Social Services.

February 18, 2009

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide outreach, education and advocacy organization that focuses on anti-hunger programs and promotes food security in the state. I am here tonight to speak on several areas of the Governor's proposed biennium budget for 2010 and 2011.

EHC! applauds the Governor's announcement that DSS will implement a change in the SNAP /Food Stamp Program that effectively increases the income guidelines and takes away asset limits for those applying for SNAP. This will increase the reach of the program significantly and will get food to many more people in the state. Many more people who were just over the guidelines but needed food will be able to get SNAP benefits – the very reason we have the program is to get people through tough times with good nutrition. As this is a federal option, and the program is paid for by the federal government the cost to the state will be minimal.

This provision will increase the gross income guideline to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is currently at 130%. Basically, this means that a family of four earning \$39,220 will be eligible. As it stand now, a family of four can only earn \$27,560 to receive SNAP benefits. This provision would also eliminate the asset test completely – currently an elderly or disabled person can have no more that \$3,000 in assets to qualify and all other can have no more than \$2,000 (this does not include motor vehicles, burial plots, or a home).

SNAP is such a significant boost to local communities that it is in the President's Economic Stimulus Plan signed into law yesterday. This will have a more immediate impact on Connecticut than the shovel ready projects therefore everything needs to be done to increase participation as soon as possible. The USDA estimates that for every \$1.00 in food stamps generates an additional \$1.84 in total economic activity as families are able to spend money on other items besides food, and more business is generated. In fact, of those that receive SNAP benefits 75% use them within the first 30 days and 90% use them within the first 3 months. The program is a great way to inject necessary funds into those very communities that need them the most, and feeds people as well. Included in the Economic Stimulus Plan is an additional \$2.5 million solely for the administration of SNAP – which should help with intake significantly. I would like to take this opportunity to publically thank our Congressional Delegation for voting in favor of Economic Stimulus Plan.

EHC! also supports the Governor's additional funds to the Nutrition Assistance line in the General Fund. This is money that goes directly to the state's two food banks, Connecticut Food

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Bank and Foodshare. Representatives from those organizations are delivering testimony on this and I can only wholeheartedly back them up. The Nutrition Assistance line item buys protein rich foods and fruits and vegetables – often hard foods for the food banks to get donated or expensive to buy. As the need for food from emergency, or community, food sites grows this is needed more than ever. Food pantries have seen past donors becoming users – an unprecedented turn in events.

Last year, the Appropriations Committee had in its budget additional funding for this program of \$1 million. While the \$200,000 proposed by the Governor is very welcome it is clear that the need is significant and as the economy gets worse, more people need the help of the food banks, and the state for that matter. Our neighboring states understand how far this funding goes to helping those in need and fund this program in the 10's of millions. Presently, Connecticut funds this at \$472,663 and the proposed increase is for \$672,663.

EHC! also applauds the Governor's commitment to feeding the state's legal immigrants through the State Funded Supplemental Assistance Plan – SNAP/Food Stamp benefits for those adults in our state who are not eligible to the federal program until they have lived in the US for 5 years. This is a very important program in helping families become assimilated and become the tax paying members of society that they and we want them to be.

There are two programs that have been cut that we believe will be a huge disservice to the residents of Connecticut. In fact, these cuts will likely cost the state more than the savings that is assumed. These programs are the States Commission on Children and the Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) that is run out of the Community Action Agencies.

EHC! works with the Commission on Children on obesity related policy and have found this commission to be one of the only state agencies to take on child obesity in a planned programmatic way that really affects change. The Commission is able to look at the whole child and his or her environment and develop solutions. The Commission's work on the Child Poverty legislation is instrumental in movement on the state's commitment to ending child poverty. There is a broad reach with the Commission, it is very active and result oriented and their research and policy is well used by the community as a whole, and helps EHC! with our work.

Finally, I would like to point out to the Committee the unseen impact cutting the HSI program will have on the state – both on getting benefits for those in need but as an economic impact as well. End Hunger Connecticut!, the Connecticut Association of Human Services and the Hispanic Health Center are all recipients of federal funding through a match with the HSI funding. Now is not the time to cut funding for a program that helps people access all the programs that are necessary to live a healthy life. The CAP agencies are able to take information and create a needs assessment and ensure that those needs are met.

As for the match, the HSI funds are used to pay for outreach workers for the SNAP program, and in the case of EHC! for our online prescreener (www.ctfoodstamps.org) and our toll-free SNAP line (1-866-97-4SNAP), as well as advertisements at the DMV to alert people of SNAP. Below is a table of our work in the state, and that is only for parts of Hartford and Tolland Counties (which we share outreach with the other afore mentioned organizations and Foodshare), Windham and New London Counties.

Last EHC! full grant period: 10/1/07-9/30/08 and first quarter of this grant year.

Contacts:	07-08	1st quarter 08-09	Total
# of contacts	6000	2300	8300
# of prescreens	1474	455	1929
# of apps	970	148	1018
NEW apps granted	735	*unknown	
# prescreens by MACC **	165	48	213
# of community events	103	24	127
# of senior centers	86	18	104
3 of literature and brochures	16,780	2600	19,380
MACC contacts	3000	2100	5100

**awaiting verification by DSS*

*** Manchester Area Conference of Churches (MACC) is a faith-based partner and subcontractor of EHC!.*

As you can see, our reach is far, and we are able to do this with the match from HSI. The state need not put any extra funding into our outreach program as it is fully funded by the USDA – all the federal government requires is a commitment from the state to the program in form of a match. Given the backlogs at DSS it is imperative that there are alternatives to helping Connecticut residents receive SNAP benefits – and coupled with the economic impact SNAP has on our state it is equally important that we continue to help those in need access this very program. Connecticut does not need to increase the bureaucracy for those who are in desperate need of programs – now is not the time to take away access. The HSI program all that we are looking for in terms of effective spending – a double bang for the buck.

EHC! receives well over 5 calls per day on our toll-free number, and we have yet to market the number. Additionally, EHC! receives at least 1-2 people filling out our online prescreener to see if they are eligible for SNAP every day. Things are hard for people in Connecticut and we are all doing what we can to assure that the federal funds are coming into Connecticut homes as quickly as possible – and we need to assure that we are spending our time on that and not on piecing together a match for very needed and well used federal funding. The HSI program works in many ways for Connecticut – not only ensuring residents receive benefits, but also brings in funds from the federal EITC through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Programs. Please let us not cut off our nose to spite our face.

Thank you very much.